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ABSTRACT

A study of current curriculum guides indicates that the most important purposes generally agreed on for studying literature are related to enjoyment and insight for the student. Teacher preparation, on the other hand, has consisted mainly in producing English majors who emphasized historical periods, famous authors, and literary criticism. In 1968, the National Council of Teachers of English produced a statement of guidelines for teacher preparation in literature which emphasized knowledge and skills. In 1976, a new statement was prepared which emphasized the teacher as helper, guide, and facilitator. The new statement emphasizes English as something people do and use rather than something people know and study. The statement has much more emphasis than earlier ones on teacher qualities important to effective interaction. Since personal qualities are as important as scholarly ones, current teacher education strategies are not very effective. Part of the difficulty is that it is necessary to do more than identify teachers who have the preferred qualities; they must be produced. Unfortunately, it may not be possible to create a teacher model which depends on personal characteristics rather than on academic skills and such a model may be outdated by future changes of educational philosophy. (TJ)

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The Compleat Literature Teacher:

"A Generous Fish"

Robert C. Small, Jr.

The purposes for the teaching and studying of works of literature in elementary and secondary schools have been much debated, especially in the last fifty years or so. Literature in the students' native language has, of course, not always been seen as important matter for study, and certain forms of literature -- notably the novel -- have gained intellectual respectability only relatively recently. A review of material on the teaching of English in professional journals like the English Journal and texts on the teaching of English produced during the last fifty to seventy-five years reveals what is obvious to anyone working in the field: there has been a considerable shift in emphasis in the reasons put forth to justify the study of works of literature. But, of course, merely because authors of articles and books on this subject shift their views, what is happening in classrooms may not change. Yet, it seems clear that a corresponding change has taken place where the teaching and studying is actually going on, although that change may not, in fact, have been as complete or as consistent as in the professional literature.

Teachers' Views on the Purposes of Literature Study

Curriculum guides produced by schools and school systems -- as contrasted to those prepared by state departments of education or on college campuses for use by schools -- reflect as closely as anything in writing the actual thinking of teachers about what should be taught and why. Based on this premise, a study was recently made of the goals, purposes, and objectives which were stated or obviously implied in a sample of current curriculum guides. The results revealed a very sizeable agreement among such guides as to why literature

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should be taught and studied and what such study is supposed to do for students. It was clear from this examination, however, that some of these purposes were actually ends in themselves, whereas others were ones that were important because they made possible more complete success in meeting the former kind. The guides never made this distinction and, in fact, consistently mixed the two types. Despite this confusion, however, there was a great deal of agreement from guide to guide. The following list headed "Most Important Purposes" contains those goals on which there was most agreement, given in order of importance. It should be noted, however, that the various guides worded the goals somewhat differently, mixed elements of more than one in a single statement, emphasized them differently to some degree, and frequently implied rather than stated which were most important. Their ranking here is, therefore, a fairly subjective judgment made by the examiner. The first three or four are, however, pretty obviously that: the goals the guides agreed most fully justified the teaching and studying of literature.

MOST IMPORTANT PURPOSES FOR LITERATURE STUDY

1. To produce students who enjoy literature;
2. To give students the insights into themselves, others, and life in general that only literature can give;
3. To provide students with enjoyment;
4. To produce students who feel that the reading of literature is personally important for them aside from enjoyment;
5. To produce students who will be lifetime voluntary readers;
6. To expose students to a variety of literature beyond what they already know;
7. To improve students' reading skills;
8. To improve students' thinking abilities; and
9. To improve students' taste in literature.

The overwhelming conclusion of these current curriculum guides was that the major purpose of literature study was the creation of students who enjoy literature. Pleasure as an end in itself or as a means of luring students to read for insights was clearly at the core of the thinking of the teachers who prepared the guides. In fact, most of the nine on that top list might be boiled down to those two -- enjoyment and insights -- both of which, it is important to note, are highly personal matters.

Other purposes were also frequently mentioned, of course; but they were hedged about by qualifications, treated as extras, mentioned as matters to be slipped in if possible and without hindering the accomplishment of the main objectives. Consequently, mere frequency of listing was not enough alone to give them "best seller" status. The list below headed "Other Purposes" contains those mentioned rather often.

OTHER PURPOSES OFTEN MENTIONED BUT OF LESSER IMPORTANCE

1. To produce students familiar with major authors,
2. To produce students familiar with major works,
3. To produce students who understand the historical development of literature,
4. To produce students who understand the influence of an historical period on the literature of that time,
5. To produce students who understand literary techniques and terminology,
6. To produce students who appreciate the great classics,
7. To produce students who like the great classics,
8. To produce students who can perform critical analysis in writing, and
9. To improve students' vocabularies.

This second list is not, like the first, an effort to present the goals in order of the combined importance placed on each by the authors of the guides, since the generally cautious or weak support given them, despite their frequent mention, made ranking them difficult. Nonetheless, as a group, they were clearly of less importance to the authors of the guides than those on the first list. In fact, as many of those on the second list were stated, they represented a kind of stubborn but not very strong or convincing belief that knowledge about literature will produce greater enjoyment of it and greater understanding of the insights it has to offer. Indeed, the very fact that most of these second level purposes were expressed generally as facilitative ones for the main purposes of enjoyment and insights reinforces the primacy of those on the first list. Nothing on either list is new, of course. But if it is true that teachers have accepted the idea that the insights, enjoyment, and responses produced by literature in the student reader should be the most important goals of the program, then the thinkers and the doers, the professors of English Education and the teachers of English are in surprising agreement.

The Preparation of the Literature Teacher

It has, of course, long been a cliché of the English teaching profession that the typical English teacher has actually been prepared to be a literature teacher. The reasoning behind this cliché is that English teachers have usually majored in English in college and that the typical college English major consists almost entirely of courses in literature. That most college English majors are overwhelmingly literature based is as true today as it was twenty-five or more years ago. Students majoring in English, then and now, take a random collection of courses in Chaucer, Shakespeare, the Romantic Poets, the Victorian Novel, and so forth. A few "contemporary" courses like "Black Literature"

or "Science Fiction" may also be allowed. On the other hand, the typical major takes few, if any, composition courses or linguistics courses, although teacher certification requirements may force a little work in each of these areas and a bit more of each is probably taken today than in the past.

But do we really mean it when we say that such a program prepares literature teachers, not English teachers? Surely not. The usual English major does not prepare teachers of any kind, certainly not literature teachers equipped to meet the goals given the most support in the curriculum guides examined earlier. What English major by that alone is prepared to bring others to enjoy literature, to read it for pure pleasure, and to gain from it insights into life. English majors really are not about such matters at all. What the typical program does prepare is that wonderful creature, the owner of a BA in English; and, despite efforts to show that such a person has a wealth of opportunities for which he is prepared by ownership of that degree, it is hard to know just what he is. Perhaps a literary scholar, although few with only an undergraduate English major qualify for the title "Scholar."

Putting aside the perplexing question of what the owner of a BA in English actually is, however, we can be pretty sure that, if he is prepared to be a teacher of literature, in the sense of that term required by the curriculum guides mentioned earlier, it is not the degree that has done it. Indeed, the major, with its emphasis on historical periods, famous authors, and the paraphernalia of literary criticism may well have rendered such teaching impossible.

The 1968 Statement

What a teacher of literature should be has been examined several times in the Twentieth Century, usually as a part of an effort to deal with the larger

question of the teacher of English in general and how he should be prepared. In 1968, the NCTE committee appointed to study this matter issued its report; and it was a moderate one, combining emphasis on both the discipline of English and the needs and nature of the students. One section of that report deals entirely with guidelines for preparation in literature. It emphasizes that the English teacher should have "an understanding and appreciation of a wide body of literature" and specifies the following as essential for that teacher:

1. Reading for enjoyment, to gain insights, and to understand and appreciate how writers order experience;
2. Having studied literature systematically, including the classics, the genres, etc.;
3. Possessing and having used critical and scholarly tools;
4. Knowing literary works appropriate to students' levels; and
5. Being able to use a variety of strategies for teaching literature, especially in order to
    a) foster a taste for literature,
    b) demonstrate the process of literary analysis,
    c) teach skillful and perceptive reading of literature, and
    d) use oral and dramatic presentations.[1]

Other sections of that 1968 statement give attention to

1. the type of person an English teacher should be: mature, creative, educated;
2. the knowledge the teacher should have of child and adolescent psychology; and
3. the type of study of methodology the teacher should have had.[2]

The 1976 Statement

In 1976, a new statement on this subject appeared from NCTE. In the introduction to this report, after a reference to the scholarly discipline approach which predominated in educational circles at the time of the earlier

statement, the following comment appears:

> Today ... our subject is viewed not only as a body of knowledge and as a set of skills and attitudes but al o as a process, an activity ... In the mid-sixties, English was viewed as an academic discipline, whose mastery was a sign of one's intellectual development.

The introduction then goes on to claim that:

> Today, many teachers agree that using English is also a means by which students grow emotionally; they respond to their experiences and learn about their worlds, their feelings, their attitudes, and themselves by using language about these subjects.

Specifically concerning literature, the report states:

> One result of this conviction has been the insistence on the affective values of English -- particularly literature. Today many teachers invite students to say how they as individuals respond to a work of literature -- what it says to them and about their lives, about other human beings, and other human life in general.[3]

This report, reflecting its philosophical position about teaching English, is not organized into sections dealing with literature, language, and composition, as was the earlier report, but rather discusses the "knowledge," "abilities," and "attitudes" the teacher of English should possess to be successful. The emphasis is heavily on the teacher as helper and guide rather than as a source of knowledge and skill; and the statement makes clear that the English teacher should be helping students to respond, grow as human beings, develop their own special qualities, and so forth. The teacher is not expected to be particularly concerned with trying to cause students to become scholars of literature, although there is, of course, some mention of the teacher possessing the traditional knowledge of literature and literary criticisms. Such matters, however, play a smaller part in this newest statement. The specific item on literature under "Knowledge," for example, calls for familiarity with an extensive body of literature; but it specifies, that

that knowledge should include literature for children and adolescents, popular literature, oral literature, non-western literature, and literature by women and minority groups. The stated emphasis, then, is on types of literature most of which have not been well recognized by the traditional discipline of English. The other point in this item calls for a knowledge by the teacher of varied ways of responding to, discussing, and understanding works of literature in many media forms.[4]

The report indicates that it is taking an approach to English as more something people do and use and less something they know and study about; and it does, indeed, do that. In fact, an informal content analysis of the 1976 report has shown that this statement contains several times as many units related to the teacher possessing a characteristics important to effective interaction with students than units related to the teacher as a scholar of English. A similar analysis of the 1968 report has revealed that it contains a larger number of "teacher as scholar" items than "teacher as facilitator" items.

Problems for Effective Teacher Preparation

This shift, then, in the official view of what English teachers should be and be able to do is in keeping with the emphasis in teacher-prepared curriculum guides on the purposes those teachers should be seeking to accomplish with their students. While one may endorse this shift, it clearly presents problems for anyone engaged in preparing teachers, for the overall emphasis in this new statement, even more heavily than in the 1968 one, is on the personal qualities of the English teacher, not his scholarly ones. The curriculum guides described earlier, by the nature of the goals they set for the teacher of English, also require a teacher whose personal qualities

are as important as, or more important than, his scholarly ones. What is being called for in both places is a person who possesses warmth; the ability to work well with people, especially immature people; a generosity of spirit; and the ability to stimulate and draw forth frank responses.

However, before committing ourselves to that view, it seems important to ask ourselves, "How do we prepare literature teachers who possess the qualities required so that their students will achieve the purposes agreed on?" And that we know a good deal less about than we should. More Milton and Chaucer courses do not seem to be the answer, although our "Compleat Literature Teacher" may want to take such courses. At the same time, literature courses built around the types specified in the 1976 statement -- adolescent literature, non-western literature, and so forth -- turn up on the transcripts of as many didactic and unresponsive teachers as open and facilitative ones. Additional literature courses of whatever kind do not seem to be the answer.

While it would be agreeable to be able to say that study and practice in methods courses and teaching internships will result in teachers developing the desired qualities, they do not of themselves do so. How does a person become warm, open, at ease, comfortable, generous, and successful in his relations with other people? How does one become what, taking a phrase from Isaac Walton's Angler, might be called a "generous fish"? The Compleat Literature Teacher must be more, of course. But the other matters like knowledge of literature and familiarity with teaching strategies can be taught in more or less conventional classes. English major classes clearly do give -- or could give if redesigned along lines already known -- the prospective literature teacher all he needs to know of the literature itself.

Methods classes can and do introduce the prospective literature teacher to strategies and sources of strategies. Internship teaching experiences can and do give the prospective literature teacher a chance to practice all that. But if the generous fish is not there already, how do we detect that fact and, once detected, what do we do about it? What, in other words, do we do about the English major who wants to teach in order to save the heathen and bring culture to the crude? The shy and introverted English major who, heaven help him, seeks the security of the classroom where he can live in the world of books? The arrogant, the egotistical, the indifferent, who go through our English courses and methods courses and come out as ungenerous as when they entered.

Frankly, no one really seems to know. There have been experiments in which early and intensive contact with students has been tried in order to reshape the prospective teacher's personality. While the results of such contact are generally beneficial, it seems to serve as much as a screening and a reinforcing device as an actual change mechanism. People who go in disliking other people, especially the young, come out as often as not confirmed in that opinion. Then there have been programs which used something approaching psychoanalysis to help the prospective teacher understand and modify his personality. While reportedly effective, such programs are probably too expensive, time consuming, and selective to be generally useful.

For the time being, then, employers of and teachers of teachers of English, if they are committed to the goals and skills they seem to be emphasizing, must seek to throw back the ungenerous fish as soon as it is caught and find the lure to catch the generous fish they want. Psychological

tests of attitude, internships, practicums, probationary periods, careful supervision, student evaluations: the means are probably there. But we need to find out whether catching one when it happens to swim by is all that is open to us or whether we can develop successful hatcheries of the generous fish. An organized effort is needed to explore the problem of producing that generous fish called for in the latest NCTE statement on the preparation of teachers.

We may find, however, if NCTE and CEE and others fund such a study, that no educational program can do so, that you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, or, staying with the finny metaphor, a trout out of a blowfish. Teacher preparation institutions are not, after all, as simple as fish hatcheries. If that is the case, careful screening will be our only answer, distasteful as that may be to our egalitarian souls -- screening, that is, or a retreat from this liberal position on the teaching of English to a more traditional one which is less dependent on the personal characteristics of the teacher. It is not helpful, after all, to establish a model of English and the English teacher for which it is impossible to prepare teachers with any degree of reliability. Yet a model that places such a great reliance on the personal characteristics of the teacher may well be one that we are helpless to implement.

A Change of Seasons

Then, too, there is a danger that the generous fish may not always be wanted in the classroom despite current curriculum guides and statements on the preparation of teachers. Walton commented of his generous fish that "it is observed, that he comes in and goes out of season with the stag and the buck." In 1968, he seems to have been less in season; in 1976, more.

Forces cause the seasons to change whether we wish them to or not. Accountability, competency testing, and back to the basics may well have the power to roll the season on to one where our generous fish will find hibernation the safest course; and a different breed of fish, more fierce, more dedicated to proclaiming its discipline, will again have its season. Or perhaps the species literature teacher, generous or otherwise, will almost disappear, as have some species of whales and Latin and Greek teachers, to be replaced by the more marketable species, composition teacher. In fact this decline of the species may already be underway, as immediately identifiable and entirely practical benefits of education come to be all the public will pay for. NCTE may finally have to appoint a new commission to draw up its own annual endangered species list.

FOOTNOTES

1. "Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English -- 1968," English Journal, April, 1968, pp. 533-534.

2. pp. 53[illegible]-536.

3. "A Statement on the Preparation of Teachers of English, " English Education, Summer 1976, p. 197.

4. p. 203.